United Nations A/55/758

General Assembly

Distr.: General
1 February 2001

Original: English

Fifty-fifth session
Agenda item 42
Special session of the General Assembly in 2001 for follow-up to the World Summit for Children

Letter dated 31 January 2001 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Qatar to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to forward herewith the State of Qatar's response to the draft provisional outcome document entitled "A World Fit for Children" on the occasion of the special session of the General Assembly in 2001 for follow-up to the World Summit for Children (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would circulate the present letter and its annex as a document of the General Assembly under agenda item 42.

(*Signed*) Adel Ali **Al-Khal**
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Annex to the letter dated 31 January 2001 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Qatar to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

[Original: Arabic and English]

The State of Qatar's response to the draft provisional outcome document, "A World Fit for Children"

Eleven years ago, the State of Qatar took part in the World Summit for Children, which produced a common commitment by participating world leaders and a universal appeal calling for securing a better future for each and every child. The State of Qatar demonstrated its commitment by signing the World Declaration on the Survival and Protection of Children as well as by adopting the Summit's Plan of Action. Thus, Qatar reiterated its commitment to those major and supportive objectives concerning children in the 1990s.

Reflecting the paramount importance attached by the State of Qatar to childhood, following its obligations on the international level and endeavouring to optimize the benefits of such reports on the national level, the Supreme Council of Family Affairs, headed by Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser Al-Misnad, wife of His Highness the Emir of the State of Qatar, was entrusted with the task of managing and coordinating national efforts to prepare Qatar's end-of-decade report on children.

That report has recently been submitted to Ms. Carol Bellamy, Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), following an extensive effort based on a definitive set of principles. They included expanding the scope of participation to include government institutions as well as non-governmental organizations, benefiting from the preparation of the report in raising awareness of children's issues and achieving optimal objectivity in data collection and analysis. Efforts are currently being made to develop a strategy to identify the conditions of children in the country, building on the conclusions of the report. Following is a brief review of the State of Qatar's achievements and aspirations in relation to the goals contained in the draft provisional outcome document entitled "A World Fit for Children":

1. In 1995, Qatar ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child. On the level of community education, a comprehensive plan is being developed to disseminate the Convention as well as to raise the level of community awareness of its articles. The Government supports international efforts aiming at universal ratification of the optional protocols concerning exploiting children in armed conflicts, trafficking in children and child prostitution. Accordingly, we strongly condemn any illegal exploitation of children, as something totally contrary to our tolerant and enlightened Islamic teachings. We encourage the efforts made by the international community to put an end to such outrageous practices;

2. After the State of Qatar ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, it incorporated the articles of the Convention in its national legislation. Further efforts are being made to ensure full compliance with the articles of

the Convention, which we consider among the important and urgent goals we aspire to achieve in coming years;

3. The State of Qatar ratified the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 182, concerning the elimination of the worst forms of child labour by 2000. The importance of childhood stems from the fact that during that period, children acquire the values and knowledge that enable them to develop into active and productive members of society. Therefore, the Government provides full support to governmental institutions concerned with child education and entertainment as well as social and cultural development of children. It also encourages initiatives by the private sector and civil society actors in this regard. Accordingly, we strongly condemn practices that deprive children from the enjoyment of their right to live childhood to the full;

4. Despite the fact that the Government's expenditure on social services was no more than 10 per cent of total expenditures of the public budget, the population of Qatar enjoys a high level of affluence as well as high-quality services in the areas of health, education and social and cultural development, ensuring a better life for children;

5. The State of Qatar is concerned that all newborn children are registered and issued birth certificates, irrespective of the circumstances of their birth. In the case of orphaned children, the State takes care to provide them with full social support, either through financial aid or by finding foster families to support them;

6. The State of Qatar makes every possible effort to achieve optimal utilization of the conclusions of the end-of-decade report by reaching full understanding of the situation of children through a comprehensive diagnosis to determine national indicators and develop programmes to promote social, cultural, moral and cognitive development in the early stages of childhood. This is to be accomplished in cooperation with relevant international organizations;

7. Family ties are traditionally strong in Qatar, where children tend to live in extended families. As mentioned above, the system of foster families is a strong and effective one, providing alternative family care to orphaned children according to our Islamic teachings. The State is currently working on establishing governmental as well as non-governmental orphanages/ foundations to take care of children without families;

8. The State of Qatar makes every possible effort to reduce all forms of violence against children. Those efforts aim primarily at identifying the scope and seriousness of the problem. The resulting conclusions would serve as a fundamental base in developing future programmes to deal with the problem;

9. The State of Qatar has developed a number of projects in the area of adolescent education and vocational training, however, those projects need further support and development. The concerned State authorities are fully aware of the importance of adopting a comprehensive approach in dealing with adolescent issues. Fortunately, the limited scope of adolescent education and vocational training institutions did not result in major problems with adolescent delinquency. This is due to the well-entrenched values of the

Islamic Arab society, which emphasizes integrating children in family structures and family activities within their respective communities;

10. National statistics indicate a decline in HIV infection rate among the 15 to 49 age group in the 1990s, from 3.6 to 2.7 for every 100,000 people. This is a result of our Islamic teachings of chastity and the conservative tendency of the society in Qatar, as well as to health awareness of the epidemic's dimensions and the effective health monitoring system;

11. Health sources indicate that no cases of HIV-infected mothers have been reported; therefore, the risk of mother-to-child transmission of the virus is currently nil;

12. In the 1990s, Qatar witnessed a decline in infant mortality rates from 12.6 to 10.3 cases for every 1,000 live births. Under-five child mortality rates declined from 16.3 to 12.7 cases for every 1,000 live births during the same period. These reductions were due to the raised level of health care as well as the promotion of communal awareness of health issues;

13. National statistics indicate an impressive record in maternal mortality rates, with only three cases reported in the country in the past decade (in years 1994, 1996 and 1997). These were due to the quality health-care services provided to pregnant women in all stages of pregnancy and to the "clean delivery" policy. Official health reports indicate that 99 per cent of all deliveries take place in State hospitals under advanced medical supervision. In this regard, a standing committee has been established recently to monitor, register, report and determine causes of maternal mortality cases, whenever they occur;

14. National statistics indicate a remarkable success in eradicating polio during the last decade, due to the health awareness of the disease and effective vaccination programmes;

15. National statistics indicate an impressive increase in the coverage of immunization campaigns against major children diseases (such as diphtheria, whooping cough, tetanus, measles, polio and tuberculosis), where coverage surpassed 90 per cent in the 1990s. As for immunization of women of childbearing age against delivery tetanus, it has been deemed irrelevant at present, as all deliveries take place in State hospitals, in clean healthy environment under advanced medical supervision;

16. Governmental as well as non-governmental institutions are making every possible effort to collect data and conduct studies to measure iodine and vitamin A deficiency disorders among children as well as in the whole population;

17. National surveys indicate that cases of cretinism among under-five children have been virtually eliminated during the past decade;

18. The State of Qatar maintains a 100 per cent coverage rate in providing sanitation services and adequate quantities of clean and cheap water;

19. It is noted that rates of school drop-outs in Qatar are still above targeted levels for certain age groups. Therefore, national efforts are being directed towards improving school environment, school curricula, teaching methods,

quality of education and the quality of training provided to teachers. The State of Qatar hopes to overcome the problem of school drop-outs by the end of the present decade;

20. The State of Qatar takes care to ensure that every child acquires the necessary level of basic education, i.e. literacy and understanding basic mathematics. However, education programmes and curricula still need to be developed so as to be more pertinent to daily life skills;

21. Despite equality between sexes in opportunities of education in Qatar, the gap notably favours females. In the school year 1997-1998, 92.5 per cent of females stayed in school to the 5th grade while the corresponding percentage for males was only 82.3. In order to correct these conditions, relevant authorities are directing their attention to studying this phenomenon and finding appropriate solutions for it.

It is clear from the above that, during the past decade, the State of Qatar, through its various government agencies, has made every possible effort to implement its obligations towards children, and towards society as a whole. We, in the State of Qatar, are fully aware of the need to double our efforts in order to further improve the conditions of children in our country. And as a State signatory of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, we strongly believe in the role played by the international community in supporting initiatives and conventions concerning children. Without such mutual support, we would not be able to build "A World Fit for Children". We further know that by serving children interests, we serve the interests of the whole of mankind.